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**Comments on Vulnerabilities of
Logistical Supply Lines to Tibet**

1. The major vulnerabilities of the Chinese Communist supply lines to Tibet are the limited number of land routes, maintenance problems associated with them, and their low capacities.

2. Since 1954, three roads have been constructed from Communist China to Tibet, of which only the Tsinghai-Tibet route is logistically important to Chinese troop concentrations in Lhasa and surrounding areas. The second, the Szechwan-Tibet road, originates at Ya-an, and was designed to serve as a major artery; but a combination of difficult terrain, unfavorable climate, and rebel activity has disrupted traffic along much of its length -- particularly west of Ch'ang-tu (Changtu). The third route, originating in Sinkiang, was completed during 1957. Since it is of little importance except to supply the relatively small garrisons quartered in western Tibet, it is not discussed in this paper. The road reportedly is closed during half the year, probably from January to June.

3. The 1,500-mile Tsinghai-Tibet road originates at two points -- to the east at Lan-chou and to the north (across the Tsaidam Basin) at Mang-liu-yuan -- a transfer point on the Trans-Sinkiang Railroad. The branches from the north and east meet at Goluo (Ka-erh-mu) on the southern edge of the Tsaidam Basin. From Goluo the road climbs the Kunlun Mountains and enters the high Tibetan plateau, where road elevations range from 14,000 to 15,500 feet and occasionally to somewhat higher elevations at passes. Across most of this plateau the terrain is level to gently undulating, and interdiction of the road would be difficult. A few east-west-aligned mountain ranges must be crossed; but, with the exception of the Tang-kul-la Mountains, passes across them are open and approaches and descents are easy. The road crosses several fairly wide but shallow streams (the upper headwaters of the Yangtze and the Mekong), but destruction of the bridges across them probably would not seriously disrupt traffic because their shallow depths would permit fording at numerous points. Greatest delays would be caused if use of the bridges were denied during the high-water period from June through August.

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4. The Tsinghai-Tibet road is most vulnerable where it crosses the Yang-ku-la Mountains through a very high (18,000-foot) pass, where blockage might cause serious problems. The terrain in the pass, however, appears to be such that blockage could be cleared without resort to the construction of difficult and costly alternate routes. The approach to the Kailans from Golao could also cause problems, as evidenced by a recent report that heavy rains during early July washed out 11 bridges, some culverts, and several roadbed sections in a 12-mile stretch of road. Except for the brief rainy spells in summer, however, precipitation is light, but some snow and ice persist in the highest passes throughout most of the year. At all seasons, cold temperatures, strong winds, and high elevations create problems for the truck drivers and complicate the operation and maintenance of their vehicles.

5. The Szechuan-Tibet road crosses far more difficult terrain, with many steep ascents and descents, several deep river gorges, and high passes that frequently are blocked by snow. West from Ch'ang-tu the road is classified as a fair-weather route, but it has been open to traffic only intermittently since 1956. Rainfall may be heavy during the summer months, and landslides are frequent. Road repairs in this difficult terrain are costly and time-consuming.

6. It has been estimated that about 30,000 Chinese troops in Inner and surrounding areas could be supplied via the Tsinghai-Tibet road. According to recent estimates, troops in the Tibet Military Region (including the Ch'ang-tu area) total more than 60,000, but this figure may not reflect the influx of additional troops required to quell the March 1959 Tibetan revolt. Some of the troops are also stationed in and near Ch'ang-tu in eastern Tibet; it is assumed that they can be supplied by the Szechuan-Tibet road. Although the section from Te-ku west to Ch'ang-tu crosses high mountains, rainfall in this area is lower than farther west, and the consequent maintenance problems are probably fewer. To the south, a fair-weather route leading from Te-an to Batang could help supply troops in the area south of Ch'ang-tu. This route also is subject to many of the terrain and climatic hazards of the Szechuan-Tibet road.

7. Air supply would be of only limited importance for the support of troops stationed in Tibet. The principal limitations are the small size of the Chinese Communist air-transport fleet and the disruption to other air activities that would result if transport planes were diverted

to missions in Tibet. The main airfield in Tibet is Tang-hsiung near Lhasa, but recent reports indicate that several other airfields are under construction.

